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CENTER FOR INDIC STUDIES

Gandhi Lecture Series



Ahimsa

A Way Of Life; A Path To Peace

by Dr. Hope K. Fitz / Fall 2007



Mahatma Gandhi's Ahimsa – an integral part of Indic Studies mission

The Center for Indic Studies at UMass Dartmouth exists to recognize India's ancient civilization and to highlight India's contribution to the rest of the world. That contribution has been substantial in many fields, including, but not limited to, spiritualism, philosophy, language, science, mathematics, astronomy, and statesmanship.

No one reflects or symbolizes the influence of India more than Mahatma Gandhi, unequalled for his impact on humankind. His message has been profound and enduring, and relates to each of the areas of interest of the Center for Indic Studies. Thus it was appropriate that the center was launched on October 6, 2001, in commemoration of the Mahatma Gandhi's 100th birthday on October 2.

Gandhi preached *Satya*—truth—and *Ahimsa*—non-violence—and his life honored these val-

ues. While he practiced *Satya* and *Ahimsa* in the pursuit of India's independence, the influence of Gandhi and his followers has extended far beyond that country. In many instances, that which is considered "Indic" is embodied by Gandhi's words and deeds.

The concept of *Ahimsa* was the focus of the stirring presentation in the fall of '07 by Dr. Hope Fitz, an accomplished philosophy scholar and an avid believer in Gandhi's philosophy. In the inaugural Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture, sponsored by the Center, Dr. Fitz urged those of Indian origin to spread the *Ahimsa* philosophy throughout the world. In that way, the worldwide community will see the importance and value of *Ahimsa*, and understand how society is best served by the practice of *Ahimsa*.

The Mahatma Gandhi Lecture Series was initiated in 2006 to preserve and honor Gandhi's legacy through academic discourse on the UMass Dartmouth campus. We expect to accelerate our efforts in the future, and hope to receive support from more scholars such as Professor Hope.



Bal Ram Singh
Director, Center for Indic Studies

Ahimsa: A Way Of Life; A Path To Peace

Dr. Hope K. Fitz
Professor of Philosophy,
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The first lecture of the Gandhi Lecture Series at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth was given last fall by Dr. Hope K. Fitz, Professor of Philosophy at the Eastern Connecticut State University. Dr. Fitz's lecture reprinted here, centered on the principles of *Ahimsa* as a Way of Life. As Mahatma Gandhi used the term, *Ahimsa*, meant non harm by thought, word or deed to any living being and the greatest love or compassion for all living creatures.

Dr. Fitz's book, *Intuition: Its Nature and Uses in Human Experience*, is in its second printing. She is presently writing the first of four volumes having to do with *Ahimsa: a Way of Life* (Basically *ahimsa* means non-harm and compassion.) She also has numerous articles published in scholarly journals. Three of the articles appear in anthologies. These articles include both western and nonwestern topics such as: Kant, Nietzsche, Heidegger, "Conditions for Individual Freedom as Applied to the European Union" (co-authored with a colleague in political science), "Islam, Ahimsa, Gandhi, Intuition, Self-Discipline in the process of Self-realization" (An account of the Yoga view and Gandhi's view of self-realization, co-authored with another philosopher from Panjabi University, India) and the Mystical Experience.

Dr. Fitz gave the key-note address at the National Student Research Conference held at the State University of New York, SUNY, ONEONTA, in April, 2006. The title of her address was: "Comparative Philosophy: Theory and Praxis." The paper is to be published in a book with the papers of the students which were picked to be delivered at the conference.

Also in 2006, Dr. Fitz received a scholarship from the Academic Council of the Academic Study of Jainism in North America for the International Summer School for Jain Studies which is held in India.



Thus, in the summer of 2006, she was in India for two months studying the Jain tradition. The study involved travel to nine cities on the West Coast of India. Also, for three weeks following the summer school, she gave eight talks on *Ahimsa: a Way of Life* in Mumbai (Bombay), Ahmadabad and New Delhi. The talks were sponsored by Mr. R. P. Jain, one of the owners of the publishing firm, Motilal Banarsidass, which published Dr. Fitz's book on intuition. In addition to her teaching and scholarly work, Dr. Fitz is the Director of the Peace and Human Rights Committee, PHRC, at her university. A minor in Peace and Human Rights was approved last fall and the PHRC is presently working on a Peace and Human Rights Center. Since 2006, Dr. Fitz has been a council member of the North American Academic Council for Jain studies.

Introduction

As Mahatma Gandhi used the term, *ahimsa* meant non-harm by thought word or deed to any living being and the greatest love or compassion for all living creatures.¹ Also, implicit in Gandhi's use of the term was the belief that one must take a vow to live by *ahimsa*, so described.²

For quite some time, I have known that Gandhi's thoughts on this ancient concept of *ahimsa* were greatly influenced by the Hindu, Jain, and Bud



dhist traditions. Thus, three of the four volumes on *Ahimsa: a Way of Life* will be scholarly works involving the examination of the origins and development of *ahimsa* in the Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions, respectively. However, *Ahimsa: a Path*

traditionally taught them that they have a privileged position in life and that animals and plants were put here for their needs and desires. They understand non-violence, but it has been confined to not committing violent acts against other human beings.



They have little or no understanding of what it means to develop an attitude and perspective such that one tries not to harm people, animals, plants and the environment. Of course, as the Jain scholars make clear, to live is to cause harm to some living creature (We unintentionally step on and drive over living things and breathe them.),³ but the point is not to harm deliberately.

It is because I believe that *ahimsa* must be taught to

to Peace is written for the people, not scholars. This is the case because, after years of working with the concept of *ahimsa* and its development in Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and in Gandhi's thought, I am convinced that if world peace and a sense of individual well-being are to be realized, *ahimsa* must be taught to and practiced by the people of the world, especially the children. It must be taught and developed as an attitude and a world perspective (*weltanschauung*). What this will take is for *ahimsa* to be loosened from its Indic moorings. It cannot be owned by anyone. It will also take a group of dedicated teachers who will offer courses on *ahimsa* to interested people of the world.

Since, in general, westerners and other non-Indic peoples do not understand *ahimsa*, I believe that the teachers should be persons who understand and are sympathetic to India's three great traditions. Thus, most of the teachers should be from one of the great Indic traditions or persons who have studied these traditions and/or Gandhi's thought.

The reason that most westerners do not understand *ahimsa* is that their monotheistic traditions have

the people of the world, especially the children that the first volume of the aforementioned works will be written for lay people rather than scholars. I think that everyone who is literate and concerned about the conflict and violence that occurs in relationships, the home, the community, nations and internationally, should be able to read this book. It is a book for the people! The major foci of concern in the book are: 1. the origins and history of *ahimsa* within Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, respectively, which culminated in Gandhi's thought; 2. what *ahimsa* meant to Gandhi; 3. my belief that *ahimsa* has to be taught to and practiced by people of the world, especially children, if there is ever to be peace and individual well-being in the world and, 4. what aspects of *ahimsa* can be taught to and practiced by all persons regardless of their traditions or cultures.

To date, I have given nine talks about *Ahimsa: a Path to Peace*. I gave eight talks in India this past summer (three in Mumbai, one in Ahmadabad, and four in New Delhi), and since my return to the United States, in late August, I gave the talk, based on the thought expressed in this paper, at the Gandhi Lec

ture Series, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Let us now consider the aforementioned subjects which are the main foci of the book and the talks about the book.

Hindu Origins and Development of Ahimsa

As I have written elsewhere, it seems abundantly clear that the origins of *ahimsa* are in the Vedic literature⁴ (which includes the early Vedic writings and the *Upanishads*).⁵ Although, we do not encounter the term *ahimsa* until the Chandogya Upanishad, in fact, there are passages in the Vedas which speak to both non-harm and compassion. In a book entitled, *Ahimsa: Buddhist and Gandhian*, the author, Indra Mala Ghosh, depicts the people living in Vedic times as basically peaceful and cooperative.⁶ He cites passages from the Vedic literature, that I have checked, which portray and emphasize: respect and filial piety within families;⁷ loving kindness;⁸ non-hatred;⁹ truth and righteousness;¹⁰ and non ill-will towards all.¹¹ Ghosh even cites a passage in the *Atharva Veda* wherein the people pray to Indra for fearlessness.¹² Ghosh links fearlessness to *ahimsa*. He says that fearless persons do not harbor ill feelings towards others.¹³ I do not agree that such is always the case. However, compared with fearful persons, who often harm others out of fear, fearless persons are less likely to strike out against strangers, new ideas, changes and non-conformists. This is because they are not easily threatened as they tend to be self-confident.

It strikes me that Gandhi's insistence on courage being logically prior to *ahimsa*, may be due, in part, to this ancient idea that cowards or fearful persons will often harm or bring harm to others in order to protect themselves or their interests. Also, fearful or cowardly persons are loath to act and, as we shall see, for Gandhi, truth required action, namely, that one stand up and speak out for what was true or right.¹⁴

In addition to the passages in the *Vedas*,

mentioned above, having to do with the origins of *ahimsa*, one can find passages that say that persons should bear no malice to animals that are not a threat to humans¹⁵ and a wish for universal friendliness.¹⁶ It seems plausible that friendliness would help to develop the positive aspects of kindness and compassion.

However, as we shall see, it was the Buddhists who fully developed the importance of compassion. It was this view and practice of compassion that affected Gandhi's view on the subject. As noted earlier, Gandhi took *ahimsa* to mean not only non-harm to any living being by thought, word or deed, but the greatest love or compassion for all creatures.

Based on the foregoing references and numerous other passages that can be found in the Vedic literature, I think it is clear that the early sources of *Ahimsa* were virtues or goals shared by Vedic people. As noted, the virtues included: honesty, friendliness, non-hatred, charity and friendliness to other humans and no unnecessary harm to animals who posed no harm.

In addition to unnecessary harm to animals, mentioned above, there is a passage in some ancillary materials to the *Atharva Veda* which describes a most interesting ancient pronouncement of a king concerning harm to animals and trees. The king had finished his ritual ceremonies with a priest, and then he turned to the people and, in effect, he said that: the prisoners of the kingdom were to be released, the animals were not to be harmed, and the trees (I presume certain trees which were sacred.) were not to be cut.¹⁷

In the Upanishads, we find further development of *ahimsa*. As noted earlier, the first time that the term *ahimsa* occurs is in the *Chandogya Upanishad*. In one particular passage of this Upanishad, one finds some advice to students given by Manu.¹⁸ He, in turn, is said to have received the advice from Prajapati and Prajapati is said to have been given the advice by Brahma.¹⁹ The advice is simply that the students are to practice *ahimsa*, i.e., non-injury to all creatures except at holy places (where



animals are sacrificed).²⁰ In the *Prasmupanishad*, there is a description of chastity (or purity). Regarding chastity, it is said that a man loses his foremost quality of chastity as soon as he injures anyone by thought, word or deed.²¹ This is key to understanding the non-harm developed to its fullest by the Jains and in Gandhi's thought.

Continuing the subject of references to *ahimsa* in the *Upanishads*, in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, one finds a description of a teacher who told his students to follow truth, virtue, welfare, and to practice blameless duty, etc. He also told the students that when they were in doubt, they were to follow the *Brahmanas* who were deemed competent to judge, devoted to good deeds, not led by others, not harsh and lovers of virtue.²²

Even though the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* are replete with words and expressions having to do with the qualities later associated with *ahimsa*, one cannot gain an idea of *ahimsa* at that time simply by combining a list of these terms. I accept the idea, which I read in Ghosh's book on *ahimsa*, that in order to understand *ahimsa* in ancient Hindu thought, one needs to take into account moral decisions about what was *himsa* and what was *ahimsa*.²³ Furthermore, this distinction seems to have been based primarily on who or what one could kill. According to Ghosh, in the *Vedas*, *Puranas* and *Dharmasastras*, only unlawful killing or injury not prescribed in the scriptures was *himsa*.²⁴ In the *Puranas* and *Dharmasastras*, only prescribed killing, especially sacrificial killing was *ahimsa*.²⁵ Also,

there were limitations to killings not prescribed. For example, a king could order killing for the protection of his people, however, in general, he was not to kill a Brahmin, priest or preceptor.²⁶ Also, in general, Brahmins, refugees and women were not to be killed.²⁷

Regarding animals, a central belief developed that one must not harm animals except for sacrificial purposes.

Given that some animals were to be killed and some not, then it seems reasonable to assume that the killing of animals which were not to be killed was *himsa*, but to sacrifice certain animals was *ahimsa*. This notion of some killing being *himsa* and some *ahimsa* is very important because, as we shall see, it was rejected by both the Jains and the Buddhists. In general, Jains and Buddhists hold that one does not harm or kill any living creature, and there can be no sacrifices! Interestingly, for Gandhi, there were exceptions to non-killing. As all Gandhi scholars know, although Gandhi abhorred violence, he would condone it for an individual who was acting in: self-defense, defense of one's loved ones, and, rarely, in defense of a nation.²⁸

Perhaps even more important than the *himsa/ahimsa* distinction, in the development of *ahimsa*, was the shift in the Hindu fundamental religious beliefs and practices. This was a shift from a form of worship involving priestly governed rites, rituals and sacrifices, in the quest for protection or boons from the gods, to a belief wherein asceticism was viewed as the highest form of the quest for self-realization. Of course, this shift was supported by a belief in the Karmic Law, abiding by one's *dharma* (duty), the *ashramas* (stages of life), yoga paths and the goal of *moksha* (release from *samsara* or rebirth). From a social/political perspective, it would seem that thinkers became disenchanted with the rule and power of the priests over all aspects of their lives.

the cause or causes of the shift, rather than focusing primarily on prayers and oblations to the gods to end suffering and grant boons, the belief developed that one creates his or her own destiny and can only end suffering by overcoming the ego self in the quest for self-realization that involves samsara (rebirth). Ultimately, overcoming the ego enables one to achieve self-realization and thereby moksha.

By the time of the great Hindu text entitled the *Yoga Sutra*, which is dated anywhere from about the fifth to the second century B.C.E., *ahimsa* was quite developed, at least as it pertains to the roots and importance of non-harm. Again, as we shall see, it was the Jains who fully developed the concept of non-harm and the Buddhists who developed the idea of compassion. In any event, Patanjali, the author of the *Yoga Sutra*, understood the importance of *ahimsa* in the quest for self-realization. For those who are not familiar with the *Yoga Sutra*, the *angas*, i.e., limbs (or what we might call stages in the process of self-realization) were written for *sannyasins*, i.e., holy persons, who were no longer interested in the material or sensual desires of life, but were bent upon a spiritual path.²⁹

Patanjali wisely realized that *ahimsa*, as non-harm, non-injury, non-violence and a vow not to harm underlies *yama*, i.e., restraints of: speech, not lying, not stealing, not-grasping or seeking to acquire more than one needs, and celibacy. Also, taking moral restraints as a whole, Patanjali realized that without the moral restraints, one could not undertake *niyama*, i.e., the spiritual *angas*, nor the physical *angas*, including the *asanas*, i.e., postures and *pranayama*, i.e., breathing techniques, let alone *pratyahara*, i.e., the conscious effort to cut off the sensory input from the *gunas*. The *gunas* are the fundamental constituents of the physical world which cause fluctuations of the mind.

Not only would these preliminary *angas* be impossible without moral restraint, but one could not begin to undertake yoga proper, i.e., the stilling of the mind, via, *dharana* (fixed attention), *dhyana* (the concentrated flow of thought and

energy between the person meditating and the object of meditation) and *samadhi* (the union of the thought and energy of the person meditating with the object of meditation to the exclusion of all else). Furthermore, the combination of the three aspects of stilling the mind in *samyama*, i.e., constraint, allows one to constrain any input from the *gunas*, thus the mind is stilled.³⁰ The stilling of the mind which leads to supra-normal insight and powers, would not be possible if one had not developed the moral restraints resting on *ahimsa*.



No doubt, Jain and Buddhist development of *ahimsa* both as a virtue and practice influenced the thought of Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutra*. As I have indicated, what Gandhi called the negative aspect of *ahimsa*, i.e., non-harm, was greatly developed by the Jains while the positive aspect of *ahimsa*, i.e., compassion, although present in the tradition of the Jains, was fully developed by the Buddhists. Why that is will be discussed shortly. Let me briefly examine Jainism and then Buddhism and then show that Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism each influenced Gandhi's thoughts on the subject.

Jain Views of Ahimsa

For the Jains, *ahimsa* is not only a fundamental tenet of their philosophy, but the very foundation of their belief system. *Ahimsa*, for the Jains, has all the "negative" meanings, e.g., non-harm, non-injury, not to hurt, that have been considered. However, the basic "negative" meaning, for a householder or lay person,



is not to deliberately hurt any living being by thought, word or deed. Even plants are not to be harmed unnecessarily. In addition to the negative aspects of *ahimsa*, there are the positive aspects of kindness, love as compassion and even gentleness.³¹

The foregoing beliefs as to what *ahimsa* is are closely tied to a complex metaphysics and a set of canonical literature and practices based on that metaphysics. For the present purposes, however, suffice it to say that Jains believe that every living being has a soul or immaterial self which is burdened by the actions of earlier existences. These actions, plus one's present actions, result in the attachment of karma, a material substance (*pudgala*), to the soul. The soul wanders from one existence to another as long as it is under the power or influence of karma and the only way to achieve salvation, i.e., become free, is to remove the material attached to the soul that obscures the knowledge of the spirit and to prevent any incoming material.³² In order to appreciate the beliefs and practices by which the Jains seek to obtain salvation, it is important to understand how broadly they view *ahimsa* and what a major role it plays in their practices both as lay people and as ascetics.

Lay persons undertake what are called "small vows" to help them progress in their quest for salvation. The term "small vows" is to distinguish the vows of a lay person or householder from that of a mendicant or ascetic. The first vow is that of *ahimsa*. The lay person is neither to harm anyone nor to wish harm to anyone. Animals are also never to be harmed. They are not to be slaughtered for meat or sacrifice. Even plants are not to be harmed except for that which is necessary. Obviously what is most necessary is food.³³

For the mendicant or ascetic, the vows regarding *ahimsa* are similar to that of the lay person, but the scope of the vows is far reaching. For this reason, they are called "great vows." Regarding *ahimsa*, the ascetic must try not to harm any living being, including plants, even unintentionally.³⁴ Of course this presents problems with eating, and indeed existing. So the householders or lay persons make possible

the life of those who have renounced the world and live the lives of ascetics. This is especially the case with food. The ascetics do not prepare their own food. The lay people are prepared and honored to serve an ascetic food if and when he or she should come to one's door.

Returning to the subject of *ahimsa*, even the Jain epistemology is focused upon *ahimsa*. Without going into all the philosophical arguments about the problems with *anekanta*, i.e., non-absolutism,³⁵ let me just highlight what I take to be the basic belief. The belief is that knowledge is only partial, as it is relative to a particular perspective of reality. Hence, truth is perspectival, i.e., it is relative.³⁶

I do not agree with the foregoing claim. First the term "relative" should not be used as this suggests that one view, idea or theory is as good as another. Obviously, such is not the case. Also, I think that Jain scholars need to carefully distinguish between theories concerned with claims about existence (be they based on fact, speculation or faith) and ethical theories which are normative, i.e., they have to do with what should or ought to be and acts that are judged right or wrong because of the theories. Since the Jains believe in non-harm, it would seem to me that they would agree that when I say "Genocide and slavery are wrong," i.e., immoral, I am making an absolute or universal claim that there is never a time when these practices are right.

Despite the foregoing distinction that needs to be made clear, it is my sense that when the Jains appeal to *anekanta*, they are concerned with particular beliefs and statements about reality. These would cover fields as broad and varied as scientific, religious, metaphysical, cultural or national beliefs. Of course, in this day and age, more credence is given to scientific beliefs, but, nonetheless, the more theoretical the theory, the less one can make absolute claims about reality. Regarding religious, metaphysical and cultural beliefs, one has to be very careful not to take an absolutist position. For it is the tight boundaries of such beliefs, as well as those of ego, that have caused humans to view persons of other



beliefs as the “others,” i.e., those non-believers who are outsiders. All too often, the outsiders are viewed as enemies, and that being so, they can be denied their human rights which may result in their being tortured and/or killed.

Focusing again on the belief in and practice of *ahimsa* in the quest for self-realization, there is one serious problem which I see with the Jain tradition. That is the problem of purification and how that quest for purification, in order to achieve omniscience of the soul, can keep the Jains from fully practicing *ahimsa* as compassion. Some of the canonical texts use the Sanskrit term *karuna* for compassion, but they also have another term for compassion, namely, *anukampa*, this term has the active sense of reaching out to help. This is what is needed in the world, and it is restricted by the Jain emphasis on purification.

Buddhist Views of Ahimsa

For the Buddhists, *ahimsa* really comes to mean compassion. The Buddhist also does not believe in harming any living creature, but it is compassion that makes this so. As it states in the *Abidharma*, compassion embraces all sorrow of stricken beings and eliminates cruelty.³⁷ It is the metaphysics of the Buddhists that makes possible this great emphasis on compassion. According to this metaphysics, there is no God, no soul and no abiding state of reality. This is so because all life is inter-connected, inter-related, inter-dependent, co-arising and co-existing. Such being the case, it would seem that compassion and kindness would be an obvious and natural response to others. Would one not tend

to love that which is a part of herself or himself? It seems clear to me that great compassion would indeed eliminate cruelty and harm as is stated in the *Abidharma*.

Buddhists, as well as Jains, extended the scope of *ahimsa* to include the non-killing of animals even for sacrifice. Also, for them, actions are primarily “mental” in that intention is the basis for action. Thus, one can harm oneself and another by thoughts.³⁸ This being the case, the Buddhists believed that what one thinks, as well as what one says and does, is to be considered *himsa* or *ahimsa*. This belief is not absent in the Hindu and Jain thought, but it is pronounced in the Buddhist tradition.

Having set forth the views of *ahimsa* in the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist traditions, I turn now to Gandhi’s thoughts about *ahimsa* which were greatly influenced by these traditions.

Mahatma Gandhi’s Views of Ahimsa

As Gandhi made clear in a 1916 issue of “Modern Review,” *ahimsa* meant non-harm, non-injury, non-violence, a vow not to hurt any living being by thought, word, or deed. It also meant not harboring hatred or acting from anger, and never resorting to exploitation. On the positive side, *ahimsa* meant the greatest love, i.e., compassion, kindness, and gentleness.³⁹ What many people do not realize is that it takes great strength of character to become gentle. It is never the act of a cowardly or fearful person. I liken it to a great opera singer, who can be heard in the top row of an old style opera house, but she or he must also learn to sing softly and that is difficult.

When one considers Gandhi’s developed



as to the nature of *ahimsa*, it is clear what the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist influence was. The non-harm was influenced by the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist, but especially the Jain view that is so concerned with harm to any sentient being. The vow was definitely Jain, as this is characteristic of their practices. As to compassion, it is clear that this was the developed view of the Buddhists. As to how *ahimsa* functioned for Gandhi, the influence of the various traditions is also clear.

How ahimsa functioned according to Gandhi

1. The means to Truth

"Truth" was equated with God and "God" ultimately meant both Atman, i.e., the True Self that is experienced as *sacciddananda*, i.e., truth, consciousness and bliss⁴⁰ (the Hindu, *Advaita Vedanta* view) and a more personal deity (perhaps the Hindu *Visistadvaita* view)

2. The sense of truth as a moral virtue and practice (Hindu, Jain and Buddhist)

For Gandhi, not lying or deceiving was not sufficient for living with truth. One had to stand up and speak out for truth. (Certain passages of Hindu, Jain and Buddhist texts, but emphasized by Gandhi)

3. The foundation of *satyagraha* (This is Gandhi's contribution to *ahimsa*. He brought it into the social/political arena.)

Satyagraha was Gandhi's truth force or soul force against the oppression of corrupt governments and/or government leaders, which required that one never take up arms or commit violent acts, but "fight" only with non-cooperation, and in rare instances, civil disobedience⁴¹. When engaged in acts of *satyagraha*, Gandhi held that, one is never to harbor anger, let alone hatred, against an oppressor.

Also, a *satyagrahi* is supposed to try to convert an oppressor to *ahimsa*. Part of this conversion is for the oppressor to experience shame for his or her act when the *satyagrahi* does not resort to violence. Us-

ing this truth force, Gandhi was able to gain a number of human rights for his people in South Africa and to accomplish what no other human at any time before or since has done, namely to win the independence of his people (specifically the independence of the Indian people from the British) with a non-violent fight for freedom. This is not to say that the Indian people never resorted to violence, but Gandhi taught them that this was not acceptable. In fact, at one point, he was willing to fast to death to stop the bloodshed between the Hindus and Muslims. They stopped rather than see him die! I cannot imagine another person who could bring this kind of peace about.

Focusing on violence, for some time I saw what I took to be an inconsistency in Gandhi's account of violence. Finally, I think that I have resolved the problem. When I, a modern day *satyagrahi*,⁴² am engaged in a Truth Force or "battle" against oppression, I must not resort to violence. However, as an individual, not engaged in a "battle" against oppression, I may resort to violence, as abhorrent as it is, in cases of defense. This is so only when all means of resolution have failed. I may act in defense of myself, my loved ones, a people, and in rare instances my nation.⁴³

Regarding *satyagraha* today, I see only a difference in the methods that can be used to counteract oppression. Today, in addition to non-cooperation and civil disobedience, one can join peaceful protests, interact with other *satyagrahis* on the internet; write books, give speeches, teach classes, etc.

What has and continues to impress people around the world about Gandhi is that *ahimsa* was a way of life for him. He lived it moment to moment. Let us turn now to an analysis of *ahimsa* as a way of life for all people, everywhere in this day and age.

Ahimsa: a Way of Life as a Path to Peace

When I speak of *ahimsa* as a way of life, I have in mind not only a virtue and practice, but a weltanschauung, i.e., world perspective, and attitudes that underlie our thoughts, words and actions. Of course, *ahimsa* must be taught and practiced, if it is to become a part of one's very way of life that affects the way one sees the world and his or her attitudes about life and relations to life. Why must *ahimsa* be taught to people of the world? Because conflict, hatred and violence are rampant in our homes, communities, nations and among nations. There is less compassion for others and anger is quickly sparked into conflict and violence. Hence, we concerned, morally responsible humans must work to see that *ahimsa* as a way of life is taught to people around the world. However, as I indicated earlier, this means that *ahimsa* must be loosened from the "moorings" of its Indian traditions so that Jews, Christians, Muslims, Confucians, Daoists, humanists, agnostics, atheists and any other tradition seeking peace can accept and embrace *ahimsa* as a way of life. Also, as I have argued elsewhere, some form of meditation and goal of overcoming the ego-centric self are necessary for *ahimsa* to develop.⁴⁴

The reason that meditation is so important is that individuals need to "still the mind" from all the fluctuations caused by the outside world⁴⁵ and one's responses to that stimuli. Via meditation, one can calm the emotions, get in touch with oneself and focus on spiritual development and/or health and well-being. As a result of meditation, one is calmer, hence, less likely to be disturbed. This is essential if one is to develop attitudes and perspectives of non-harm and compassion.

Concerning the ego, in my judgment, overcoming the ego is a goal that one must undertake if she or he it to practice *ahimsa* and thereby achieve that goal. As I have mentioned and will shortly discuss in more detail, ego is the true source of harm.

The Teaching and Practice of Ahimsa:

I think that most of us would agree with Gandhi's oft-stated belief that violence begets violence. If we do accept this belief, then it seems logical and reasonable for us to conclude that it is *ahimsa*, both as an attitude and as a perspective that is needed to counteract the conflict and violence in the world. However, if we truly want peace and individual well-being, both for ourselves and future generations, then we must act. Theory is only a preliminary step to praxis. What is clear is that the ancient principles and practices associated with *ahimsa* must be taught to and practiced by a number of people, especially children, in the world if there is to be peace and individual well-being in this world. Given that we accept this view, what can be taught?

What Can Be Taught to Develop Non-harm and Compassion:

1. Overcoming the Ego

As was realized by the ancient seers and philosophers of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, it is the ego which causes harm to oneself and to others. The ego forms what I call "tight boundaries" of the self which prevent self-development or insights into reality and also are at the root of all conflict and violence. Westerners do not as yet share this view of ego, but they have the greatest problems with it. For them, the term "ego" suggests Soren Kierkegaard's idea of an integrated personality. An integrated personality is something to be desired, but ego, suggesting the tight "boundaries of the self" that bring one's focus and interests only to the self is not good. Westerners would tend to call this condition, "self-centered." However, I tend to agree with the general view of ego which Patanjali's described in the Yoga Sutra. In this sutra, he described the aspects of ego as *raga* and *dvesa*. *Raga* can be described as the attraction to those people and ideas that feed the ego and *dvesa* can be described as an aversion to those



people and ideas which threaten the ego. Raga can build tight “boundaries of the self” which are harmful to ourselves and indirectly to others because we are not concerned with them, however, it is *dvesa* that makes us strike out and hurt others. In order to overcome ego and prevent harm, we can teach the following practices:

2. Anekanta

We need to realize that much knowledge is perspectival, i.e., dependent upon one’s perspective, and that one’s perspective is affected by where and when one lives, the level of education and/or experience which one has, and one’s openness or receptivity to new ideas, etc.

3. Aparigraha

As mentioned earlier, the notion of *aparigraha* is found in the Yoga Sutra and greatly emphasized by the Jains. It is so important that we do not become obsessed with material things and sensual pleasures. If we do, we tighten the “boundaries of the self” thereby forming the *raga* aspect of ego. As this ego, we are focused on self-interest, self-image, and self-aggrandizement. In effect, we become what a westerner would call “self-centered.” As such, we tend to view others, especially those who do not feed the ego, as competitors or even as threats to our desired ends. As mentioned earlier, Patanjali called this aspect of ego, *dvesa*.

4. Vows

Taking a vow to follow a principle or belief is an important Jain practice that Gandhi obviously adopted. If one takes a vow not to intentionally hurt any living being, then she or he is more likely not to cause harm. The vow is a promise to oneself, if you will, to abide by a principle or belief. I would suggest that vows can be internal, i.e., having to do with attitudes and perspectives and they can be outward, i.e., having to do with one’s actions. Thus, I would take a vow to work to develop *ahimsa* as an attitude and a perspective. I would also take a vow not

to (intentionally) hurt any living being and to have the greatest compassion (that I am capable of) for all living creatures. Here, I must admit that I still kill some creatures, e.g., flies, silver fish and moths, especially if they are invading my “space.” However, I am becoming much more conscious of the right for every creature to live. Of late, I am trying to remove some unwanted insects or bugs to the outdoors instead of stepping on them or swatting them. Also, my husband and I have accepted the fact that two little red squirrels (and probably their babies) have a home in the walls of our colonial house.

Regarding the harming of animals, one must acknowledge that many people in this world eat meat. It does not seem reasonable to expect that all people at this time could or should become vegetarians or vegans. What is reasonable is to ask that all people become aware of and counteract the cruelty of animal farming and that one never harm any animal except when necessary. However, some persons would argue that animals can be harmed in experiments for medical knowledge that could save human lives. I am, at the present, very conflicted about this harm to animals. I seriously question the privileged position of humans.

Regarding plants and the environment in general, all persons can be taught to respect the life on the planet and not to intentionally exploit or damage the delicate eco-system. Also, persons have to be taught about sustainable energy which does not deplete the world’s natural resources or cause global warming. As one of my brightest students, who is studying sustainable energy, said about this issue: “Energy, acquired from the sun, the water, the wind or from biomass can be produced independently of or with a green reduced environmental impact.”⁴⁶

5. Extending Non-harm to Thought and Speech as Well as Deed

As I noted early in the paper, this ancient idea of non-harm by thought, word or deed, is found in the Vedic writings. However, in these writing, the idea pertains to humans. As non-harm is developed by

and accepted by the Buddhists, it does not just apply to humans. Animals can react to both word and the tone used to impart those words. Thus, they can be harmed by words. Also, the thought of harm affects the character of the person harboring the thought. In addition, I would argue that the effect of those thoughts impacts her or his words and actions.

6. Compassion

If one has developed compassion as an attitude and perspective, then I believe that she or he would not deliberately harm others. What would be the reason? Love, as compassion, does not incite the passions to anger or harm. The attitude of compassion is exemplified by the Dalai Lama. Even though he is the High Holiness of Tibetan Buddhism, many of his books do not address the complicated literature, rites and rituals of his form of Buddhism. Rather, he focuses on compassion and related virtues as inherent parts of human nature.⁴⁷

If I were to give voice to compassion, I would use terms such as sympathy, empathy, charity, but the most important component of compassion, as far as I am concerned, is the reaching out to help: those humans or animals who are: injured; in pain, physical or psychic; infirm, indigent; those who for some reason are mentally dysfunctional; and those in any kind of need. It is the "reaching out" and not turning away that is important here. It is the callous disregard for the plight of others that is unacceptable. I say this recognizing that each of us is limited as to ability, time, etc. However, each of us can do more. Sometimes we can help directly, sometimes, we can engage the help of someone else or an institution. Sometimes all we can do is to contribute time or money. However, every effort helps. Think of the work of past President Jimmy Carter. He has done and is doing so much to help people in the world. At present, he and his associates are trying to eliminate a number of debilitating and life-threatening diseases in Africa.

Finally, to show the relatedness of non-harm and compassion, I quote a statement from my stu-

dent whom I quoted earlier. (He also happens to be a westerner who has been practicing Buddhism for a number of years.) "The process of practicing compassion is a form of non-harm. Through right understanding of karma, society and the environment, it is possible to meaningfully and effectively "reach out." By knowing the results of one's actions, one can seek to act compassionately by reducing harm to humans, animals and plants. Through this process of effective change, one's compassion synthesizes with one's non-harm leading to higher states of consciousness and greater compassion."⁴⁸



ENDNOTES

- 1 "The Modern Review," 1916 as quoted in *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, by Raghavan Iyer, London and New York, Concord Grove Press, 1983, pp. 178-184.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 This is widely known in the Jain community. I was exposed to the thought in the many lectures that were presented at the International Summer School for Jain Studies, ISSJS, 2006. I was there on a scholarship from June 1 through July 31, 2006.
- 4 I have written about this in numerous articles including "The Importance of *Ahimsa* in the Yoga Sutra, in Gandhi's Thought and in the Modern World" This article was published in India's "Contributions and Influences in the World," ed. by BhuDev Sharma, President of the World Association of Vedic Studies, WAVES, published by WAVES, 2005.
- 5 Of course the Upanishads are the concluding part of the Vedas, but they are published independently of the early Vedic writings.
- 6 Indu Mala Ghosh, *Ahimsa: Buddhist and Gandhian*, Delhi, India, Bibliographies Bureau, co-publisher, Balaja Enterprises, 1989, p. 34.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid., pp. 34-35.
- 9 Ibid., p. 35.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Iyer, pp.70, 75, 149, 176.
- 15 Ibid.; *Voices of the Vedas: a Selection of Hymns from the Bhumananda Saraswati*, New Delhi, India, Aiga Samaj Publishers, 1936 (examples: SV, VI, Ch. II; RV, X, V 142).
- 16 Ghosh, p. 35.
- 17 B.R. Modah, *The Ancillary Literature of the Atharva Veda*, New Delhi, Publisher, Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan, 1993.
- 18 Ghosh, p. 40, *Manu* – the Law Giver of the Indian Tradition.
- 19 *Prajapati* - Lord of creatures; creator, Lord of Becoming; *Brahma* – Creator of the Universe; on of the Indian Trinity (*Brahma, Siva and Vishnu*).
- 20 Ghosh, p. 40.
- 21 Ibid., p. 41.
- 22 Ibid., p. 40.
- 23 Ibid., pp. 1-3.
- 24 Ibid., p. 2.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid., p. 3.
- 28 Iyer, pp. 199 - 207.
- 29 I believe that these *angas* greatly influenced the Buddhist Eight Fold Noble Path.
- 30 Hope Fitz, "The Nature and Significance of Intuition in the Yoga Sutra and in the Writings of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan," published in the *Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol XXVI, Spring/Autumn, 1995, Nos. 1 & 2, Punjabi University, Patiala, India.
- 31 Gandhi picked up this sense of gentleness in his notion of *ahimsa*.
- 32 Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, Reprint, 2001, Chapter IV. "The Mechanism of Bondage."
- 33 As is well known by Jains and especially Jain scholars, what one eats is determined by the level of a sentient being. This is measured by what senses a being has. The levels range from 1 through 5. A 1 - sensed being has the abilities to touch, to have a body, to inhale and exhale and the ability to live life. The level 5 includes both living organisms and sentient living beings. The difference is that sentient living beings have the ability to think.
- 34 "Jain Education Workshops," Previn K. Shaw, Jain Study Center of North Carolina, education@jaina.org (a two day workshop given in New Haven Ct., 2006).

35 I am disturbed by the varying and problematic accounts of this epistemological position. In fact, I plan to study it in some depth in the ensuing years. I am now a member of the Jain Academic Council of North America, so I will be in India at least every other year working with the International Summer School of Jain Studies and pursuing my research on Jain studies.

36 Of course, as I say in the paper, the term “relativism,” gives the false impression that one idea, belief or theory is as good as another. Also, as I suggest in the paper, this is just one of many problems with the description of *anekanta* that needs to be addressed.

37 Ghosh, as quoted in the text, p. 27.

38 Ghosh, pp. 4, 62.

39 Iyer, as quoted in the book, pp. 178 – 184.

40 Gandhi actually took *saccidananda* to mean: truth, knowledge and bliss. See, “Truth is God” (Gandhi’s sayings about the subject) ed. by R. K. Prabhu, Ahmedabad, India, Navajivan Publishing House, c. 1955, p. 19.

41 Hope K. Fitz, *The Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. XXVII, Spring-Autumn, 1996, Nos. 1 & 2, Panjabi University, Patilala India, p. 103. Although Gandhi first took civil disobedience to be a right but not a duty, in his later more developed thought, he accepted it as a duty that should only be practiced when necessary.

42 I wrote an article “*Ahimsa* as Viewed by a Modern Day *Satyagrahi*” which was published in “The Times of India,” August 7, 2006.

43 Iyer, pp. 199-207.

44 Hope K. Fitz, “The Ancient Indian Beliefs and Practices of ‘Overcoming the Ego,’ ‘*Ahimsa*’ and Meditation Profoundly Affect the Development of Modern Indian Society and the Global Community.” I was told that this paper would be read for me at the International Indology Conference held at Kala Academy in Goa, India, February 8 – 10, 2007. I was unable to attend the conference.

45 The Zen Buddhists refer to these fluctuations, when one is trying to meditate, as “monkey chatter.”

46 My student, Adam Brzozowski, is a senior who has taken several majors at our university. He is also very active in the Peace and Human Rights Committee of which I am the Director. Furthermore, he is the Past President of Student Peace and Human Rights Organization which he and another student started about a year ago.

47 One of the older books written by the Dalai Lama is entitled *Buddha Heart, Buddha Mind: Living the Four Noble Truths*, tr. from the French by Robert R. Barr, New York, The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1999. In the book, he cites a prayer recited by the monks. “Practicing love according to knowledge, I shall strive for the good of beings; I make before the buddhas The vow of spirit of perfect Awakening.” p. 149.

48 Brzozowski. See endnote #xlvi.

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